

seen from a distance, the even outline of an abruptly truncated cone. On the summit, as we learn from Plutarch, there was a crater with steep cliffs, and having its interior overgrown with wild vines, and with a sterile plain at the bottom. On the exterior, the flanks of the mountains were clothed with fertile fields richly cultivated, and at its base were the populous cities of Herculaneum and Pompeii. But the scene of repose was at length doomed to cease, and the volcanic fire was recalled to the main channel, which at some former unknown period had given passage to repeated streams of melted lava, sand, and scorïæ.

Renewal of its eruptions. — The first symptom of the revival of the energies of this volcano was the occurrence of an earthquake in the year 63 after Christ, which did considerable injury to the cities in its vicinity. From that time to the year 79 slight shocks were frequent; and in the month of August of that year they became more numerous and violent, till they ended at length in an eruption. The elder Pliny, who commanded the Roman fleet, was then stationed at Misenum; and in his anxiety to obtain a near view of the phenomena, he lost his life, being suffocated by sulphureous vapours. His nephew, the younger Pliny, remained at Misenum, and has given us, in his Letters, a lively description of the awful scene. A dense column of vapour was first seen rising vertically from Vesuvius, and then spreading itself out laterally, so that its upper portion resembled the head, and its lower the trunk of the pine, which characterizes the Italian landscape. This black cloud was pierced occasionally by flashes of fire as vivid as lightning, succeeded by darkness more profound than night. Ashes fell even upon the ships at Misenum, and caused a shoal in one part of the sea—the ground rocked, and the sea receded from the shores, so that many marine animals were seen on the dry sand. The appearances above described agree perfectly with those witnessed in more recent eruptions, especially those of Monte Nuovo in 1538, and of Vesuvius in 1822.

The younger Pliny, although giving a circumstantial detail of so many physical facts, and describing the eruption and earthquake, and the shower of ashes which fell at Stabiæ, makes no allusion to the sudden overwhelming of two large and populous cities, Herculaneum and Pompeii. In explanation of this omission, it has been suggested that his chief object was simply to give Tacitus a full account of the particulars of his uncle's death. It is worthy, however, of remark, that had the buried cities never been discovered, the accounts transmitted to us of their tragical end might well have been discredited by the majority, so vague and general are the narratives, or so long subsequent to the event. Tacitus, the friend and contemporary of Pliny, when adverting in general terms to the convulsions, says merely that "cities were consumed or buried."*

Suetonius, although he alludes to the eruption incidentally, is silent as to the cities. They are mentioned by Martial, in an epigram,

* *Haustæ aut obrutæ urbes.* — Hist. lib. i.